

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 422 220

SO 029 044

AUTHOR Socha, Donald E.
TITLE Perspectives on the Mexican Education System: Prejudices, Problems, Possibilities. Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminar Abroad 1997 (Mexico).
SPONS AGENCY Center for International Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Education; Cultural Awareness; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Global Education; Higher Education; *Latin American History; Latin Americans; *Mexicans; Multicultural Education; Preschool Education
IDENTIFIERS *Latin American Studies; *Mexico

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complex Mexican educational system and how numerous factors influence its success, depending on one's point of reference. Many ideological and subjective judgments are made in this evaluation. Non-compulsory preschool enrollment figures show tremendous growth in the past 25 years, as does the growth in the number of children 6-14 years old attending school. In 1992 the process of educational reform undertook four important movements: (1) decentralization of the system from federal to state control; (2) curricular reform of basic education; (3) in-service teacher retraining courses; and (4) reform of teacher training programs. The paper argues that this reform procedure represents a tendency toward greater democracy, autonomy, and self-rule in the Mexican educational structure and process, but these tendencies have been circumscribed by prejudices within Mexican society. The paper cites the various kinds of prejudices to be found in Mexico, including racism, sexism, nationality, and overpopulation. The potential for Mexico to achieve its educational goals is greater now than ever before in its history, yet the people must address the issues of social injustice in the society. (EH)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

SO029044

"Perspectives on the Mexican Education System: Prejudices, Problems, Possibilities"
October 1997.

IN RESPONSE TO REQUESTS FOR
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

Rosalie
Gendimenico

IN THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this
document do not necessarily represent
official OERI position or policy.

Dr. Donald E. Socha
Associate Professor of Spanish
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Donald E. Socha

An evaluation of an institution as complex as that of Mexico's educational system would necessitate consideration of multitudinous factors, some of which might indicate improvement over time, depending on one's point of reference, and many of which are bounded by ideological or subjective judgments. Some of these factors are riddled with problematic interpretations. For example, the 6% growth of 6-14 year old children attending school between 1990-95 could lead to some erroneous interpretations about social and economic change facilitating improved attendance if one neglected the fact that only in 1993 did compulsory education extend to the middle school years. While statistical evidence can often be misleading, it would not be incorrect to view some longer range trends as indicative of genuine improvement of the educational mission. In this century the average schooling for the 15+ age group grew from one year to 7.2 years; illiteracy slid from 68% to 12.4% during the same period. Non-compulsory preschool enrollment figures also show tremendous growth in the last twenty-five years. Statistics alone, however, paint only part of a picture. Indigenous females still exhibit illiteracy rates of over 48%. Education is also an act of trained and committed individual educators, dedicated to reforms, but also bound by socio-cultural constraints. In 1992 the process of educational reform undertook four important movements: 1) decentralization of the system from federal to state control, 2) curricular reform of basic education, 3) in-service teacher retraining courses (known as *PRONAP*), and 4) reform of teacher training programs. Inherent in this reform procedure is a tendency toward greater democracy, autonomy and self-rule in the Mexican educational structure and process, but these tendencies have been circumscribed by prejudices within Mexican society. As with all reforms, there are problems and possibilities implied by the very changes being

¹ Source: *Censo de población y vivienda 1995*, INEGI (provided by Mexican Secretaría de Educación Pública)

wrought.² Today in Mexico there is greater knowledge than ever about improved educational techniques³ and about the potential applications of technology for enhancing instruction.⁴

Awareness of humanitarian goals propounded by diversified classroom techniques and curriculum⁵ and the sincere desire to deliver the best education possible by all levels of educators are in the forefront of the various plans and projects developed by individual Mexican state agencies⁶, the *Secretaría de Educación Pública*⁷ and National Teacher's Union (SNTE). These goals, ambitious

² See the article "*Desigualdad y fracaso escolar*" published in *Básica* (número 3, enero-febrero 1995), 25-37, published by the Mexican Teachers' Union (SNTE) for the members. The article addresses the fact that over the past fifteen years, despite compensatory programs, failure rates among the country's poor and marginalized is scarcely improving. The children do not finish *primaria* (elementary school).

³ I was provided the entire set of *Libros para maestros* by the Mexican SEP. These texts are provided free to teachers, in this case at the *secundaria* level, and are published by the *Subsecretaría de Educación Básica y Normal*. I found the teacher subject area texts to include the most recent methodological approaches, to be a valuable source of techniques and to offer activities stimulating student-centered interaction and creative thinking.

⁴ To give only one small example, students are using e-mail pen pals to develop their capacity of expression, analysis and confrontation with dissimilar opinions as motivational devices to stimulate a desire to read. A description of the project is in *EDUSAT: Guía de programación* (Año 1, No. 5, septiembre-octubre 1997), entitled "*Vida e imaginación en los libros*," 5-8. This is a publication of the Mexican SEP.

⁵ The entire edition of *Básica* (Año II, noviembre-diciembre 1995, número 8) is devoted to intercultural education and diversity issues. Today, the concepts guiding subject content lean toward the recognition of cultural, ethnic and linguistic plurality as opposed to currents preferring assimilation or cultural and/or socioeconomic incorporation from the past. The articles in the magazine are professional, superbly written and extremely innovative in their perspectives and insights. Also see Alejandra Pellicer Ugalde "*Alfabetización en lengua indígena o lengua indígena para alfabetización?*," *Básica* (Año III, enero-febrero 1996, número 9), 13-17.

⁶ Querétaro, Guanajuato and Chihuahua, among others, all have projects and strategies for improving education. Guanajuato's Comprehensive Program for Quality 2000 focuses on education as the backbone for economic improvement. Querétaro plans continued fortification and consolidation in all facets of public education (State Plan for Holistic Educational Development). Chihuahua's efforts to regain lost territory in relation to other states is based on strategic systems of analysis and community action (see *Foro 21*, No. 8, junio 1997) a monthly publication of the *Coordinación y Desarrollo Académico* of the *Dirección de Cultura del Gobierno del Estado de Chihuahua*.

⁷ The SEP publishes an ambitious strategic plan which incorporates suggestions from the SNTE ("Ten Proposals to Ensure the Quality of Elementary Education") entitled *Programa de Desarrollo Educativo 1995-2000* (*Poder Ejecutivo Federal: Mexico, 1996*).

as they are, are unfailingly at odds with factors which hinder effective implementation of new techniques, technology, diversity and the best hopes and efforts of educators. Huge problems caused by poverty, poor funding and teacher pay, and rapid population growth in the last two decades-which has created a lack of teachers and the proper time to prepare them well-make any attempt at delivering quality rather than quantity instruction more than a small challenge.

Mexico's social and economic challenges cannot be disassociated from its objective to improve its educational system's performance. Of fundamental importance in sustaining controlled change is the political stability and enhanced democracy such as that promised by the 1997 elections which point toward the possibility of at least a two-party system. Article VIII of the Federal Education Law of Mexico states the following:

The criteria which will orient the education imparted by the Government and all Primary, Secondary and Teacher Education, and any kind imparted to workers or peasants, will be maintained free of religious doctrine and, based on the results of scientific progress, will fight against ignorance and its effects, fanaticism and prejudices.⁸

The challenge to educators challenge to educators implied in this principle and the elaboration of the prejudices operant in Mexican society merit attention. To that effect, Lidio Ribeiro's work *Prejuicios sociales y educación en México* will be instrumental in highlighting some of these problems and in admitting perspective through comparison of perceived prejudices to recent accomplishments and projects planned to diminish social stigmas.

Ribeiro questions whether it is possible to educate, as mandated by law, with a view to develop the individual and to transform society into one with a feeling of social solidarity in an

⁸ *Artículo 30 y Ley General de Educación* (Miscelánea Gráfica, S.A. Oficialía Mayor de la Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico, 1993), 52. Translation to English is mine.

environment affected with prejudices which inhibit on the individual level and distort on the collective level (174). In his methodological analysis of social prejudices he includes statistical samples and anecdotal evidence, encompassing a wide range of variables-gender, economic, age, geographic, etc. (20). He defines prejudice as "all value judgments assumed with regard to people, institutions, ideas and conduct, based on superficial accounting of the factors which are treated as foregone conclusions (14)."

First, Ribeiro cites the peculiar type of racism prevalent in Mexico, which he says is fed not only by the dominant group, but which is also fed by segregated groups, and which is marked by an absence of marked racial conflict (32-33). Internalized feelings of racial inferiority have been noted by Rodolfo Acuna, Octavio Paz, Samuel Ramos and others. Until proven otherwise, notes Ribeiro, "we Mexicans are victims of a clumsy prejudice with psychosocial repercussions which negatively affect our education and distort our relationships (41)." Despite strides to create bilingual programs and to ethnicize subject content, this prejudice is still pronounced in some circles when attempting to justify special programs tailored to Mexico's eight million indigenous and culturally marginal inhabitants. The prejudice, however, is not reserved for the culturally marginal, for it is also operant in the mestizo society.

Second, Ribeiro discusses the prejudice of man's psychological superiority over woman, a *machismo* which often is accepted and justified by women, particularly in lower economic classes. This prejudice applies to child rearing and to paternal participation in the daily lives of children---meaning schooling---relegating mothers to roles of caretakers and, paradoxically, decision makers on most points of family life. The implication for educators is clear---women are expected to enter only certain fields, women have limited participation in social activities and women assume role models based on male virility which include having many children, devoting

energy to domestic activity and serving the man. While the feminist movement is strong in Mexico, the masks covering conventional and essentially agrarian gender role expectations are still worn, thereby hindering more complete diversification, individualization of the curriculum, opportunities and educational horizons.

A third prejudice impinging on education deals with Mexican's feelings of nationality, of common purpose and of a single idea of nationhood, which Ribeiro states do not exist, but rather are counterpointed by regionalism, the lack of feelings of inclusiveness and of a system of common values. When evidenced, nationalism is most often a current of self-defensive feelings, or an attitude not conditioned by external factors, as in an affirmative and intrinsic sense of oneness, but rather one wrought by external actions and pressures (115-129). The negative effects for education are illustrated by "the mania of teachers to resort to stereotypes and preconceived mental schemes, with the mistaken purpose of developing ultra nationalist sentiments which are to be innately inserted into students (130)." This approach condenses history into certain heroic deeds which divide spirits rather than harmonize them (131). Other effects of a lack of common national purpose can be seen in the tendency to indiscriminately imitate whatever pedagogical novelty comes from the United States and to hide any serious and relevant critical analysis of Mexican reality so as not to affect the patriotic feelings of the student, which could result in the rejection of the teacher by the student (132).

Finally, the prejudice of overpopulation keeps Mexicans from appreciating, in their proper degree, the real problems of dependency, of economic underdevelopment and of the poor distribution of wealth, with all its derivative, such as unemployment, illiteracy, marginality, urban sprawl, mal nourishment, demographic explosion (often confused with overpopulation) and all

those evils which are generated by Mexico's socioeconomic organizations (159). The tendency is to relegate all problems to the effect of overpopulation, with its side-effects of creating a popular lie promulgated by the dominant class and accepted by subordinates as an excuse for rejecting their demands. On another level, the myth of overpopulation (a comparison with Japan is often cited as an example of what need not be true) has created a current of xenophobia with a closed-door policy to all exchanges, thereby submerging Mexico in an endogamy where cultural perspective is lost. The only culture which flows directly into Mexico is from the United States, which, in a comparative mode, has perpetuated and enhanced the perceived prejudices of the Mexican people.

Ribeiro's analysis is well taken and operates as an explanation of many of the socioeconomic factors conditioning educational reform in Mexico. There are other internal problems within the educational system itself, to which we shall turn our attention before discussing the advances made in the last decade to improve education from both without and within, for strides have been made in alleviating the intensity and impact of these prejudices and problems. Additionally, there remain numerous positive points to be tabled about the current state of education in Mexico.

The following discussion centers around some of the most pressing problems affecting education in Mexico. It will be organized according to the following structure: first, general system wide problems of public education will be listed, followed by personnel-morale issues affecting educators. Third, material needs will be addressed. A short discussion of curricular issues will lead into the fifth area of concern, or the higher education system, with its strong contrasts, imbalance and lack of proportion.⁹

System wide challenges in Mexico's educational institutions include frequent class sizes of

⁹ See Huascar Taborga Torrico, *Análisis y opciones de la oferta educativa* (ANUIES: Mexico D.F., 1995), 65.

40-50 students in a single small classroom, especially in elementary education. This problem is worse in some rural areas, where funding for education is low and teaching positions are not prized. Thirty percent of Mexico's schools have only one teacher and these often remote schools are strapped for materials. Inequality is endemic to the system---wealthier states such as Veracruz, Sonora and Mexico are able to provide opportunities, teachers and materials that are absent from poorer state schools such as Morelos and Oaxaca. The pressures of a nationwide decentralization of federal control is creating fears that the inequality will be exacerbated even more. Public universities are offering students less and less. The best Mexican universities are indeed private and elitist. Even at the primary and middle and high school level, private schools for the wealthy and for foreign students offer huge advantages over government funded schools. Mexico's public schools are generally not supported by business or industry. Local pride in a community school is often what converts a public school into a special place of learning. Parents need to play a more integral role in educating their children and in supporting the mission of the schools. Finally, Mexico has a poor system of vocational/technical schools. These schools, which are an alternative to the high school or *preparatorio*, are often considered educationally inferior and serve as great conduits for training potential factory workers in the ever increasing numbers of foreign owned assembly plants or *maquilas*. These centers should be converted into centers of detection and analysis of the national problematic, especially that associated with production.¹⁰

Personnel problems resulting from suspicious hiring practices and lack of confidence in the equitable decision making power of administrators were mentioned by many teachers and representatives of the *SNTE* as significant factors affecting their professional attitudes. Teaching

¹⁰See Lidio Ribeiro, "La tecnología en la problemática nacional," in *Geopolítica y Educación en México* (CHDET: Mexico, 1994), 123-134.

positions are still filled in some areas according to subjective criteria regardless of qualifications. Many faculty are part time while at the other end of the spectrum 52% of teachers have double positions. Only one-third of the country's teachers are with one group of students. At the middle-school level the average teacher has 800 students per week. Half of these teachers have no pedagogical preparation. The profession lacks social status, partly because of the historically low educational involvement of Mexicans, augmented by the fact that 86% of teachers are female. The poor social standing of teachers is reflected in the very poor economic situation of teachers.¹¹ Teachers also complain of a lack of adequate time to reflect, collaborate, evaluate, plan and investigate due to the conditions under which they teach. These pressures and demands on teacher time factor prominently in creating conditions resistant to improvement in all aspects of the educational mission, despite the heroic efforts of the most committed instructors.¹² Finally, the deficiency in educational training of teachers, including teacher training, is echoed in the paucity of bilingual teachers, a factor affecting diversity issues and the ability of the system to remediate social ills. The SEP does not attempt to disguise these problems. They are openly discussed in the *Programa de Desarrollo Educativo*.¹³

As could be expected in a financially strapped system where the balance of funding is spent on teacher salary, material needs---paper, pencils, resource materials, videos, audiovisual equipment, etc --- are in short supply and in poorer schools are nearly absent. The government provides textbooks for students in compulsory education classes (grades 1-9) which means that in *preparatorias* or high schools, which are not compulsory, the lack of books is often pathetic.

¹¹ Teachers are finding a middle class lifestyle less and less attainable. See "*La disputa por el salario y carrera magisterial*," *Básica* (Año III, número 10, marzo-abril 1996), 21-28.

¹² This report from the National Education Association of the United States from 1994 was translated by Maria de Ibarrola and reprinted in *Básica* (Año III, número 10, marzo-abril 1996), 43-52 under the title "*¿Es cuestión de tiempo!*".

¹³ See pages 19-29 for a detailed discussion of the challenges facing the system.

Many high school libraries are no more than a few shelves of aged textbooks which are checked out by students who lack their own classroom texts. Public libraries in Mexico are rare and books on the open market are relatively expensive compared to Mexican average salaries. Space is a rare commodity in these poorer schools. Classrooms tend to be smaller than in the United States and are much more crowded and frequently used. Science laboratories are poorly equipped, as are the work stations and raw materials for student practice in the country's *Instituto Tecnológico* or Vocational Education Programs, which are separated from the college preparatory high schools. Some of these *Tecnológicos* appear as little more than training grounds for eventual jobs in assembly line *maquiladoras*. Typical classrooms in Mexico's public schools are Spartan, depressingly so, with little color, no bulletin boards, few resource materials accessible for student perusal and often with no electrical outlets, screens for viewing videos or slides or classroom furniture other than student and teacher desks. In the best of situations, public schools may have several computers available for student use, usually housed in a media room, which students are permitted to use for special class projects. Generally, very scant technology is employed in public education at any grade level. The most expensive universities, such as *UDLA-Puebla*, the Queretaro Campus of the *Universidad Tecnológico de Monterrey* and the *Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara* rival the better United States schools in technological facilities available for student use. All of these universities are private. Higher education, or *Educación Superior*, will be addressed in greater detail farther along in this report.

Regarding curricular issues there is a struggle between the *SEP* and the *SNTE*, or National Teachers' Union, for control over decision making regarding curriculum. The *SEP* provides a list

of approved texts for use in *primaria* and *secundaria*, from which teachers are to select their texts. There is autonomy of choice at the high school level. Subject area pedagogical texts for teacher use, whose role is to consolidate quality teaching across the system, are provided to these same teachers. While these teacher texts are impressively contemporary regarding their methodologies and philosophies, one wonders if their suggestions are so easily implemented. Comments from teachers spoke to the passive nature of most students who are accustomed to traditional teaching methods requiring memorization rather than inquiry-based learning or problem solving techniques. While the public high school curriculum seems quite advanced and demanding compared to United States high schools, the subject areas are almost entirely academic. There are few classes which deal with such important issues as sex or consumer education, the media or the arts. Since most schools run a double shift, there is little time for extracurricular activities. Physical education is nearly always an unstructured outdoors "courtyard" event. Mexico's problem is not so much one of appropriate curriculum but rather of the capability of delivering it effectively given conditions of crowding, poverty, lack of space and materials. Problems also surface when reviewing the bilingual programs that are used for indigenous cultures in Mexico. Many more teachers trained in multicultural education are needed. The curriculum exists, but again, few teachers are trained in this content area and materials are in short supply or nonexistent. Social prejudices fanned by the zeal of neo-liberalism are not being solved to the benefit of these marginal groups, which also face a history of persecution, misunderstanding and devaluation by the greater society, thereby accentuating the unwillingness by some to implement ethnic-centered curricula.

Mexico's *Educación Superior*, or Higher Education, is diffuse and disproportioned (in subject areas and concentration of students within those areas, numbers going on each next highest

degree, over-popularity of certain programs and careers, etc.)¹⁴ Compared with other similar countries, Mexico's enrollment in Higher Education is proportionally low. The country boasts many subsystems within Higher education: public and private universities, public and private technological institutions, normal schools, *UPN* (National Pedagogical University), *CEBETYS* (a bachelor's degree level institution focusing on technology and services), *CONALEP* (national professional institution at bachelor degree level), *INEA* (national institution for adult education), plus other educational centers.¹⁵ Programs in Higher Education tend to be rigid, allowing few if any elective classes and focusing more on theory than practice. Continuing education is rather new in Mexico and there are almost no community colleges as in the United States.¹⁶ The *SEP* attempts to alleviate the shortage of high schools by allowing more universities to open high schools. Also being attempted is the creation of a bridging program for students who graduate from the Technological Teaching Institutes (not *Preparatorias*) but who wish to attend a university, with its professional training focus. Remedial courses would be in order for these students who have little knowledge when graduating from these often saturated technical schools.

Without delving into wishful projections or fanciful thinking, Mexico's educational system has great potential and possibilities for resolving many of the prejudices and problems delineated above. For Lidio Ribeiro, "the elimination of social inequalities constitutes the first step toward effacing social prejudices...to the extent that Mexico affirms and unifies its personality as a nation,

¹⁴ Huascar Taborga Torrico discusses these disproportions in his study *Análisis y opciones de la oferta educativa* (ANUIES: Mexico, 1995), 65-72.

¹⁵ Javier Mendoza Rojas addresses the attempts made by ANUIES (*Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior*) to articulate and empower Higher Education to oversee, not homogenize, these subsystems in *Problemas y desafíos en la planeación* (ANUIES: Mexico, 1995), Numero 7, 23-32.

¹⁶ In 1992 the *Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara* opened Mexico's first Community College, modeled on and connected with United States community colleges.

the individual Mexican will affirm his or her personality and, as a result, will become free of myths and of compensatory fantasies."¹⁷ Common goals, a sense of national destiny with historical objectives are needed to realize Mexico's potential and to convert it into a materially well-off country, healthy in both the somatic and spiritual realms, powerful happy and just. Many improvements are already taking place in Mexico in this social arena. Women are making huge gains in education. Some feel that the new generation of Mexican women is contributing more than anything else to a stabilization of the population and to an improvement in the quality of instruction. This shift toward a more equitable status between the sexes---the emancipation of the female voice which for centuries has been silenced as in Sor Juana's day---could by itself influence nearly all of the socio-cultural prejudices conditioning the educational setting in Mexico.

Quite obviously, a forward looking stabile political structure which altruistically seeks to prioritize education for all and converts Mexico's dependent economy into one with strong internationally competitive industries and quality services would work wonders in a country which already spends 30% of its budget on education. In an era of decentralization, many states are taking their own initiatives to strengthen their competitiveness in these areas of concern. Guanajuato's Comprehensive Program for Quality 2000, an alliance of public and private sectors, seeks to implement strategies and techniques which would create a total culture of quality in all productive sectors of society and the economy. In addition to fostering the implementation of international calibrations and standards in business and industry, creating marketing programs and market acceptability, the backbone of this thrust toward quality is, happily, education. Opportunities to further education are being opened to greater numbers of school-aged children. Next year 26,000 new spaces are opening at the high school level for those students who meet

¹⁷ *Prejuicios sociales...*, 185-86. The translation to English is mine.

entry requirements yet would not have had the chance to continue their educations. This year one thousand students on the lower end of the economic scale have been awarded full scholarships to attend *preparatoria*, or high school leading to professional degrees. Scholarship amounts will be adjusted upward yearly. The state of Chihuahua has been recognized by UNESCO for its innovative efforts to systematically and comprehensively assess the educational mission through total participation of all the actors in the social setting. The plan, called *PESECH* 1997-2005 (*Plan Estratégico del Sector Educativo del Estado de Chihuahua*), exemplifies the true concern existent in many Mexican states for providing an educational environment which will help combat student attrition, disappointment over the educational scenario and rampant failure. Compensatory programs such as school breakfasts, hostels for the indigenous who live far from the schools they attend and greater focus on rural districts attempt to equalize disparities. Herein lie the possibilities to begin a far-reaching transformation which may see the slow demise of some of the limiting socio-cultural factors highlighted at the onset of this report.

Accompanying these localized initiatives at enhancing educational possibilities are the many efforts on a national scale by the *SEP*, *SNTE*, *ILCE* (*Instituto Latinoamericano de la Comunicación Educativa*) and other numerous institutions. These organizations have initiated some important reforms in the past five years which point toward enhancement of possibilities for improving the system as a whole. *SEP* published a program for the transformation and strengthening of the country's normal schools on July 11, 1997. This program would effect not only student trainees but also the teaching and administrative staff at the country's teacher training schools. In the same vein, *SEP* has constructed a new Plan of Studies for the Masters in Primary teachers. Said profile addresses specific intellectual abilities, pedagogical knowledge, teaching skills, professional and ethical identity and sensitivity to social conditions in the school

community.¹⁸ The recognition of teaching as a profession from within by demanding better prepared teachers will help to create greater public confidence in the value of an education and may help to ameliorate some of the moral and personnel problems referred to previously. A parallel movement to retrain teachers already in the profession through workshops organized around media presentations could also prove beneficial. Known as *PRONAP (Programa Nacional para la Actualización Permanente de los maestros de educación básica en servicio)*, its purpose is to strengthen discipline-specific knowledge as well as to keep teachers abreast of pedagogical practices and their applications to the learning environment. In Cuernavaca, teachers of ESOL have spent many Saturdays attending training workshops on language teaching methodology to better their performance in a pilot project in the elementary schools. Stephen Krashen, famous for his now widely used Natural Approach to language teaching, has given several workshops to teachers in Cuernavaca. Reports on the effectiveness of the program and of the amazing proficiency of many of these young students are encouraging. Currently, schools in that city are adjusting the middle school curriculum to accommodate these motivated and prepared students and to articulate their learning process.

The *SNTE* spends much time and energy in professional development of its members, while also campaigning for better salaries and benefits. The articles published in *Básica*, the revue for members of the teachers' union, confront the problems and challenges of instruction and attempt to offer observations, comments and solutions to them through incisive empirically-based articles and reports. The awareness promoted by this organization is an important part of the integral process of improving the system.

Finally, technology offers many possibilities. *ILCE* has initiated a pilot project called *Red*

¹⁸ *Plan de Estudios: Licenciatura en Educación Primaria (SEP: Mexico, June 1997)*, 29-32.

Escolar (Student Network), an Internet service to primary and middle schools which will begin to provide computerized informational and support services to teachers and students. *EDUSAT* is a satellite television program sponsored by *SEP* available to schools with the equipment to receive transmissions. *SEP* is involved in promoting distance education also. For 1996 the project's priorities included: expansion of *EDUSAT*, establishment of *videotecas*, *telesecundaria*, middle school for adults and equipping more schools with televisions. The objectives of this application of technology are to improve the quality and scope of institutionalized teaching, to compensate for adult deficiencies in education, to improve the competitiveness of the Mexican work force and to promote a life long culture of education. *ILCE* also trains professionals in the use of technology and educational communications.¹⁹ The 1996 annual report of *CONCYTEG* (*Consejo de Ciencia y Tecnología del Estado de Guanajuato*) answers one of the problems mentioned by of life in Mexico. Some of the council's projects include: "Protection of Tannery Workers from Infectious Diseases," "Human Resources in the Tanning Industry," and "Search for Solutions to Environmental Pollution in Brick Manufacturing".²⁰

Mexico's potential for achieving its educational goals is greater now than ever before in its history. While social justice is not a complete reality, classroom conditions are sometimes detrimental to learning and economic limitations weaken teacher motivation and student material sufficiency, to insist on immediate eradication of these shortcomings is to unfairly focus on a synchronic perspective of the current educational scenario, without regard to historical prerogatives conditioning the present. In final analysis, the problems besetting Mexico's school system mimic some of the very same ones plaguing to a lesser degree United States schools,

¹⁹ See the Catalogue: *Centro de Estudios en Tecnología Educativa y Comunicación, ILCE*.

²⁰ "Informe Anual 1996," *CONCYTEG* (Marfil: Guanajuato, Gto.), 13-14.

• "Perspectives on the Mexican Education System: Prejudices, Problems, Possibilities"

which in turn suffer from those unique problems often found in industrialized superpowers. It is wise not to compare the two educational systems when considering what is the best direction for Mexico. Mexico needs and deserves the freedom of choice to set its own course, one more consonant with its own culture and history, independent of the tendency to mimic the systems to its north. Considering the situation in Mexico only two decades ago in relation to the projects, plans and programs receiving support today, one can only applaud the great strides gained in promoting and implementing educational imperatives for ever greater numbers of Mexicans.